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Human rights key to successful elections, says UN official in West Africa



17 March 2011 – Promoting and upholding human rights before, during and after an electoral process is critical to whether or not that election is ultimately a success, a senior United Nations human rights official said today.

Patrice Vahard, a senior human rights adviser with the UN Office for West Africa ([UNOWA](#)), told the UN News Centre that it was vital that the protection of human rights be made a priority in planning for an election.

“With no less than 17 elections coming up this year [in the region], human rights are going to be key to those elections being peaceful,” he said. “We need to insist on the centrality of human rights in the electoral process.”

UN human rights officers from across West Africa wrapped up a two-day meeting today in Dakar, Senegal, issuing a communiqué in which they expressed concern over rights violations during recent elections in the region, such as in Côte d’Ivoire.

Mr. Vahard cited the Ivorian experience, where hundreds of people have been killed since incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo refused to leave office after his UN-certified defeat by opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara in last November’s presidential ballot.

“These bad examples could serve as a lesson to be proactive in mainstreaming a culture of human rights,” he said, citing practical steps such as introducing training for political parties, security forces and electoral officials and staff on human rights whenever an election approaches.

Mr. Vahard said monitoring of human rights violations should also continue for a month beyond the proclamation of final results, as violations often occur in the aftermath of a poll.

The UN also has a critical role to play, he noted, in disseminating messages of tolerance and human rights awareness before, during and after a poll.

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